

DHMAS Budget Hearing/Health and Hospital Subcommittee
Legislature Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Testimony of Larry Henrickson in support of Connecticut Legal Rights
Project's Home Project

My name is Larry Henrickson and I reside in Winsted, CT.

My career in human services has afforded me an array of opportunities to experience the many benefits and at times, challenges associated with the system of care in this state.

The late Allen Melville of the Melville Charitable Trust, who was one of my dearest friends, was instrumental in bringing me into this cause. Allen championed and advocated for safe, decent and affordable housing of their choice for DMHAS clients, citing this as a foundation for serenity and recovery.

My resume includes serving on the Board of Directors of various agencies supporting recovery for individuals suffering and recovering from mental illness and homelessness, including NAMI-CT and Clubhouse International in NYC. I am currently the Vice President for the Board of Directors of Prime Time House, a community based organization serving 19 towns in Northwestern CT. I served on the former Governor's Blue ribbon Commission on Mental Health, and until my retirement, worked as the Community Liaison Director of the Connecticut Legal Rights Project's Home Project. Throughout my journey of assisting others with their recovery; there remains a common denominator, the co-morbidity of mental health and homelessness.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of our valued disabled clients who choose to receive services from the Connecticut Legal Rights Project.

As budget cuts across the services become necessary, it is imperative to continue the funding of projects like these, which serve as the lifeline for many individuals across our state. It is of my humble opinion, that additional funds for these programs are vital to ensure that those who need them are able to acquire and retain safe-decent and affordable housing of their choice. I am deeply concerned that these valued services will no longer exist and the disabled will continue to suffer for it. I hope this is not the case.

A massive cut in private funds to Connecticut Legal Rights Project has already taken place. Simply put, inadequate funding to Connecticut Legal Right's Home Project will create gridlock in areas of the housing system and force people to remain

unnecessarily in an inappropriate setting that interferes and delays recovery and increases the already high tax payer costs. Declining quality of service and decreased availability results in undesirable consequences such as homelessness and incarceration of individuals who would have otherwise benefited from treatment. Residents living with mental illness in the community encounter discrimination and harassment that can result in illegal evictions, loss of housing subsidies and homelessness.

People are very much at risk of losing their housing simply because they are people with disabilities. Stable affordable housing sustains recovery but obtaining and retaining decent housing and rent subsidies is a challenge for DMHAS clients. The Connecticut Legal Rights Project's Home Project protects clients housing in their recovery and early every case taken in by Connecticut Legal Right's Project ends successfully.

This program offers hope to people in our communities. Without it, people at risk can experience a vicious cycle of mental illness and homelessness. Stability in their living conditions, and safe, decent affordable housing of their choice is a key component in rehabilitation. It provides the support system essential in maintaining recovery for those suffering in our communities. The Connecticut Legal Right's Project needs the adequate funding to continue to provide statewide housing advocacy for DMHAS clients.

And yes, the communities have "called" and government has "answered"—it's time for change. It is the time to effect positive change and to give a voice to those who are unable to advocate for themselves, for this generation and for those to follow. SAFE, DECENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING OF THEIR CHOICE is the "destination". CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT'S HOME PROJECT is the "vehicle".

I thank you for your consideration of my testimony.



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